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U.S. Envoy Outlining Policy for Panama

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PANAMA, June 15 — The United States Ambassador here will deliver a formal definition of American policy on Panama to the Government here on Monday, according to an American Embassy spokesman, after charges in Washington that the head of the Panamanian Army is a drug dealer, money launderer and occasional spy for Cuba.

The Ambassador, Arthur H. Davis, was originally scheduled to have delivered the message last Friday, but asked for a postponement until Monday.

The formal expression of Administration policy is seen as a key element in the growing political crisis here set off by the charges made by American officials against the Panamanian Army commander, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. The charges were the subject of a New York Times report last

Thursday.

In the last two days opposition leaders have called for the resignation of the army high command and a Government investigation of the activities of General Noriega, who is seen as the true holder of political power here.

An Appeal to the Military

The opposition Christian Democratic Party went a step further Saturday night, choosing the politically risky course of calling on "responsible officers and troops" to seek new military leaders.

The increasingly open confrontation with the de facto military Government forms part of a prolonged political struggle in Panama, where the military has imposed or deposed five presidents in recent years and is suspected of having killed a leading opposition figure, Dr. Hugo Spadafora, last September.

"We are in a period of remilitariza-

tion of our society," Ricardo Arias Calderón, head of the Christian Democratic Party, said in an interview today. "The structure of military power is more and more naked."

Mr. Arias noted that in recent months there had been unexplained attacks on his party's headquarters and on a leading Christian Democratic legislator. In addition, the Government has shut down an opposition radio station and censored a leading opposition radio commentator.

Election Fraud Suspected

The army, known as the Panama Defense Force, seized power in 1983 but permitted a limited return to civilian rule in the last few years. However, the army is widely believed to have stolen the last election in 1984, imposing its candidate, Nicolás Ardito Barletta, who was then summarily dismissed when he backed an inquiry into the killing of Dr. Spadafora. Dr. Spadafora's decapitated body was found stuffed in a United States mailbag in Costa Rica just across the border with Panama.

In the months since then the army and its political allies have continued to control the Government and have angrily denied the charges made by American officials against General Noriega in the last few days.

The general himself has characterized the accusations as part of a campaign to keep Panama from taking control of the Panama Canal in the year 2000. There are rumors that he is organizing a demonstration in support of the Government later this week.

The charges made in Washington have raised major questions about United States policy toward Panama because they appear to have been purposely disclosed by several American officials who conceded they had known of General Noriega's reported criminal activities for years but tolerated them because he was useful to the United States.

Attempt at Ouster Seen

The accusations have led to speculation here that the Reagan Administration is now seeking General Noriega's ouster because he is no longer so useful to the United States.

Both American and Panamanian political analysts say Pentagon and Central Intelligence officials have long relied on General Noriega for intelligence information and as a guarantor of the main United States military base and intelligence-gathering center in Latin America, situated along the Panama Canal.

But American officials, speaking in interviews before the latest charges against General Noriega were made public, blamed him for failing to bring the political liberalization that the Administration sees as necessary for the long-term stability of Panama and, by extension, the security of the Panama Canal.

Even General Noriega's chief critics say they remain cynical about American policy concerns in Panama.

Several Panamanian politicians bitterly recalled that despite knowing that the last presidential election was a fraud, the Administration sent Secretary of State George P. Shultz to the inauguration of Mr. Barletta. At the height of anti-Government protests in March, they said, the United States held joint military maneuvers with the Panamanian Army.

U.S. Embassy Won't Comment

"The United States chief interest here is the security of the Panama Canal," Mr. Arias said. "In all these years they have known exactly what Noriega was doing. But now they are against him because they feel he is a source of instability rather than stability."

A spokesman for the United States Embassy refused to comment on American policy here.

At present the political opposition appears too divided and too weak to force major changes. Opposition leaders say that instead they hope a barracks coup will lead to General Noriega's removal.

So far General Noriega has treated his critics with considerable restraint. The opposition La Prensa newspaper has been allowed to print regular front page stories on the general's alleged criminal activities and has repeatedly demanded his resignation.

Pro-Government newspapers have replied, with no apparent sense of irony, by accusing opposition politicians and journalists of being the main drug dealers in Panama, where strict bank secrecy laws are widely believed to have attracted billions of illicit dollars.